

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-2
November 15, 2016
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Public Works Director, Eduardo Santamaria

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-2 [3:53:47 p.m.]

Discussion item regarding Miami-Dade County Resolution No, R-822-16 urging municipalities within Miami-Dade County to partner with the County to secure state and federal funding to assist with eliminating septic systems and converting to sewer system. (Sponsored by Commissioner Lago).

Mayor Cason: Let's move onto F-2, which is Vince.

Commissioner Lago: If we could have our Public Works Director come up. I asked him to give a little background information. I don't know if you received it or I was the only one that maybe received it, but the County sent forth an ordinance or was it a resolution, I think it was a resolution, a resolution in reference to what their plans are for transferring from septic tanks to sewer systems throughout the County and I want to kind of have a brief discussion, maybe a few minutes, I know it's the end of the day, and I asked our new Public Works Director to give us a

little bit of background in reference to if we did entertain this, what would be the potential cost associated and the benefits, some of the drawbacks, but more importantly just kind of see if we were even interested in potentially entertaining that over the next 10, 15, or 20 years.

Public Works Director Santamaria: Improperly maintained septic systems can have a negative effect on water quality. I provided a brief kind of synopsis of a preliminary investigation that we concluded. As the Commissioner mentioned, the County did pass an ordinance, which is urging municipalities to work together with the County in securing matching funds to convert septic systems to public sewer systems. And so, presently there are about 6,000 homes in the City that are serviced by septic systems. They are primarily there to service single family residences, there are about 250 or so commercial septic systems; and so the process of converting a septic system to a sanitary sewer system is somewhat complex. It involves the abandonment the existing septic system; it involves connecting to the sanitary sewer system. In this case where we have a large majority of homes that do not have a septic system and there is no infrastructure abutting these homes, the cost of connection can be considerable. And so, we did some quick numbers, the estimates that we offer are preliminary in nature, they are very rough estimates, and I would recommend that if we are going to have some more firm estimates that we do further study. But right now we are looking at a total estimated cost of about \$340 million between owners and the City. I'd be happy to look at what the County is doing, they are doing an internal study to analyze the impact to County properties that had the same situation, and with that information I'll be able to provide a more firm estimate. At the end of the day, it will probably be a good idea if this is going to be deliberated to a serious extent, that we do some sort of a full-fledged engineering analysis to come up with what the impact might be.

Commissioner Lago: Mayor if I may, but just for now what you proffer, I think, is a good idea maybe we can just keep an eye on what the County is doing, because they have a consent decree that came down from the federal government to the tune of \$13 billion that has to be spent to upgrade the existing sanitary sewer lines throughout the County. I want to be honest, I don't know enough about how transferring over, even though I've heard from many people who have stated that moving in the direction of a sanitary sewer and getting away from septic tanks will do wonders to water quality, will provide a much more safe environment. We obviously have the issues of sea level rise, but then I was speaking with the Public Works Director and he made some very clear examples of how there also are some drawbacks when you go to sanitary sewer lines in reference to aging infrastructure, maybe not today when you upgrade, but maybe in 20 or 30 years. So, I just want to bring it to your attention due to his competent nature just have him do a little background in reference to what the County is doing. They are moving forward, they have a ten year plan, correct me if I'm wrong, but they've got to deliver as per their consent decree by the federal government, and I'll just like to see if maybe we potentially entertain upgrading or we stay the course.

Commissioner Slesnick: Is there money from Dade County or...?

Commissioner Lago: This is very preliminary. By the way, the \$13 billion is a bond that's being floated by the County, it's a bond.

Public Works Director Santamaria: And that is also for water distribution as well.

Mayor Cason: And also take a look at whether or not this could be groups of citizens or neighborhoods that would want to join in. I had representatives from the church that want to put a sewer, but it's extremely expensive for them. Maybe in certain areas it might be easier; you might have a conglomeration of maybe around UM or something.

Public Works Director Santamaria: So what's driving this is that the Governor in July did propose presenting to the Florida Legislature that the Legislature provide matching funds to municipalities that wanted to pursue this, and so the County is basically saying, telling the municipalities jump on board we'll go after this together. To go to Commissioner Lago's point about the aging infrastructure, the number that provided does include about \$50 million to proactively address some of the aging infrastructure that we have in the City. Right now we are doing some of that work; we are lining some sewer lines to address infiltration and inflow problems, but as these sewer lines get older we do have the potential for problems.

Mayor Cason: It's sort of one of the biggest issues in the future. There are so many homes that are on aging septic, it's going to be extremely expensive, it's a question of whether the federal government, whether the President-Elect's infrastructure includes helping municipalities or if it's just highways. So let's wait and see what the Legislature does and whether there is real money.

Commissioner Lago: As Commissioner Slesnick will probably tell you, she's the one that deals with residential real estate. You know you have issues where somebody buys a home they want to build a pool, they can't, they want to build an addition, they can't, they want to build a driveway, you can't build over the septic tank.

Commissioner Keon: You can move it.

Commissioner Lago: But these are expenses that, again, we have to take a look; we have to take everything into consideration. I just want to do more homework and I wanted to bring it to the attention of my colleagues, so maybe in six months you can come to us and say look, this is what the County with an update to see where we are at in six months.

Mayor Cason: And put in what the potential savings could be from spending every year pump out are, whatever five years, probably some savings there too.

Commissioner Slesnick: Did you say there were 6,000 homes in Coral Gables with septic tanks?

Public Works Director Santamaria: That's correct.

Commissioner Slesnick: So they are mostly like west of Granada from 8th Street down to U.S.-1.

Public Works Director Santamaria: That is the general vicinity. I'll be more than happy to provide a map.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: They are also east of Granada.

Public Works Director Santamaria: I'll be more than happy to provide a map that indicates where those areas are. I'd also be more than happy to provide a copy of the County report as soon as I receive it.

Commissioner Lago: Perfect.

Mayor Cason: Great. Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you sir.

[End: 4:01:09 p.m.]